

Heisel, Leanne

From: Jim Mastin [firechief@ci.livingston.mt.us]
Sent: Wednesday, December 26, 2007 12:15 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Wild land comments

My name is Jim Mastin and I am the fire chief in Livingston, Montana. I want to focus on one aspect of the wild land issue that you and the committee may not be hearing much about and that is medical coverage for the teams. We have worked with several type 1 and 2 teams who have set up base camps in and around Livingston over the last several years. I have observed many different interesting ways those teams provide emergency medical coverage for their personnel. This ranges from having a full paramedic transport ambulance assigned to the base camp or spike camp to having some Emt's with no ambulance. For example the Southwest teams always insist on having paramedics and an ambulance contracted and assigned to the team. They really put a strong emphasis on taking care of their people. I strongly believe that this is the right approach.

The Northern Rocky teams seem to be comfortable with EMT's or some paramedics, but rarely want to have an ambulance contracted. They seem to be content on dialing 911 and taking the chance on ~~getting the local~~ ambulance to respond. I observed several base camps that had around 500 folks assigned that had to wait some 20 to 30 minutes for an ambulance when they experienced a medical emergency. One was the camp cook who had a heart attack. They dialed 911 and had their basic emt's attending him until we arrived some 25 minutes later with paramedics. What if we had been tied up on another call? Some of the camps are larger than most towns in Montana.

I have had several conversations with the medical leaders on these teams and they seem very frustrated that they can't get their bosses to allow them to contract an ambulance with paramedics. It appears to be a money issue. When I see all the money these teams spend on fire suppression I would think \$2,000 a day for a paramedic ambulance is rather small potatoes.

Having advanced life support medical transport coverage should be one of the highest priorities when it comes to the type of work our firefighters have to perform. Our statistics tell us that most of the firefighters who die in the line of duty die from heart related events. When I look around the camps I don't necessarily see all physically fit young people. I think we owe it to all those who show up to help the best Ems coverage money can buy. It sends a strong message that we care about our folks and their families.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be reached at 406-223-9461.

Thanks for allowing me to comment.

Chief Mastin

Fire Suppression Committee c/o
Leanne Heisel - Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

January 8, 2008

Dear Fire Suppression Committee,

I write in hopes that the Fire Suppression Committee is willing to go beyond simply addressing one of the symptoms of climate change. I believe a comprehensive approach to living with fire needs to go beyond stop-gap measures aimed at treating symptoms. Ignoring the factors that bring about the malady is quite likely a waste of time at best; and, at worst could make the basic problem worse. Specifically, the Committee needs to begin by deciding whether or not climate change is occurring and likely to make portions of Montana more arid. After reviewing the evidence the committee needs to take a public position on the subject so people become aware of the context in which fire management is being addressed. If the Committee chooses to simply ignore that rather basic issue, it needs to tell the people that as well. Since there are scientists already on the state payroll with expertise in this field the Committee needs to begin by utilizing that resource.

Since I live with National Forest on three sides of the property I will try and respond specifically to item 4, *State and Federal Policies*.

- A) At the present time, my ability to hand pile and burn debris is restricted. I can not burn during the months of December, January, and February. This is an arbitrary impediment that has to do with air quality, but ignores the fact that on well ventilated days it could be done. The regulation restricts us entirely during the three months of the year when fire danger is lowest and burning would be safe. I am perfectly willing to work as a volunteer to reduce fuel near our home - federal and state regulation deny, or severely restrict, the opportunity.

Solution: Put an end to these arbitrary regulations, education forest users, and rural property owners, on how to address slash and debris removal, and encourage the public to participate. This would cost relatively little, maximize volunteer contribution, and enable people to reduce threats.

- B) The wide spread loss of lodgepole pine coupled with high energy prices should allow us to capitalize on the potential of wood to reduce fuel bills. At the present time we permit cutting without requiring piling and burning of the residue. In addition county road crews on occasion clear adjacent to road right of ways and simply leave the debris. Consequently we have a dangerous accumulation of debris along roadsides that presents the potential for careless ignition in areas laden with fuel.

Solution: We need stewardship training for those we permit, and would now encourage, to utilize fire wood and perhaps engage in fuel reduction. We also need to create an equivalent of the Civil Conservation Corps to address fuel reduction along travel routes, wood cutting areas, and the rural urban interface. Such a program could be funded from the coal trust fund created under the coal severance tax (please use the earnings and don't keep trying to raid the trust).

- C) The budgets of the U.S. Forest Service are in decline in terms of real dollars available for management. Arbitrary cuts, probably driven by the current political ideology, are creating a FEMA in the forest. Agency budgeting needs to reflect the need this Committee is addressing.

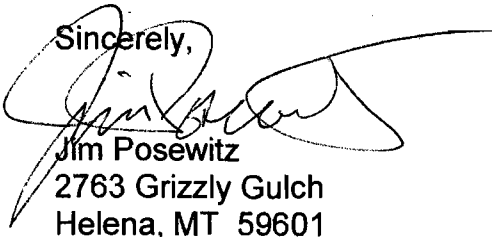
Solution The Committee should conduct an analysis of the issue just described to determine its extent. If the concern is valid, recommendations to Congress legislative resolutions, and other actions to secure funding can be initiated.

- D) In the event that a consensus develops that climate change is probable, steps can and should be taken to reduce carbon emissions.

Solution The first step would be to include carbon emissions as a part of the environmental analysis of forest management planning. Industrialized fuel reductions will probably do more harm than good and should be avoided. Non-motorized recreation should be encouraged and given priority in planning. There are several state programs that use off-road gas tax monies to accommodate motorized recreation. These programs and funds should be redirected into planning and implementing recreational activities that leave a minimum carbon footprint. If carbon emissions are in fact at the core of this problem we really need to do more than just throw resources (money) at the fires that result.

What have been suggested above are steps that can and should be taken in addition to the other topics the Committee must address. All the suggestions are achievable. The suggestion that we try and reduce our carbon emissions by the simple tactic of reducing the use of motor recreation is admittedly the tinniest of steps. Taking that first step however is important to give us confidence that the Committee understands the serious nature of climate change. Maybe next time I will suggest a resolution to terminate NASCAR where we drive around in circle to see who can add carbon the fastest. But for now let's simply put on our cross-country skis and walking shoes.

Sincerely,



Jim Posewitz
2763 Grizzly Gulch
Helena, MT 59601

Dick Schwecke
225 17th Ave. NW
Great Falls, MT 59404
January 8, 2008

Comments on Fire Suppression Program in Montana
Sent via e-mail to Leanne Heisel at lheisel@mt.gov

Response to a news article by John Cobb on 1/4/08 in Great Falls Tribune.

I am a retired forester, with 40 years experience in the Forest Service. I was a certified silviculturist for part of my professional forestry career, which means I am skilled in how to harvest trees and grow them back. I have fought wildfires for the past 43 seasons. I have been on Incident Management Teams for the last 19 years. I continue to work on an Incident Management Team (IMT) from North Idaho as the planning section chief.

I'm not certain what the State legislature is looking for in regard to changing the fire suppression efforts in Montana. In my mind, you have fire fighting efforts that are the responsibility of the State of Montana to pay for, and then you have fire fighting that is paid for by the Federal government. The following are random thoughts about both.

1. Reducing fuels is an absolute effective tool to reduce fire intensity.

One of the most effective tools to reduce fire severity on public and private lands will be to increase the acreage of fuel reduction / timber harvest operations. Over the past 10+ years, I have repeatedly seen big fires loose intensity when they spread into harvested areas. Our Operation Chiefs are always looking for road access and for areas that have the fuel loads reduced....that is where the firefighters can do a lot of good. Fire behavior changes significantly when the main fire reaches an area that had been harvested or had some sort of fuel reduction treatment. It is simple common sense. Where humans have reduced the fuel load prior to a fire, the fire intensity is much less.

There are all too many news articles by environmental activists that claim there is nothing but harm caused by timber removal. They are self-serving lies. [I'm sorry, there is no other polite term for many of their statements except to call them lies.] It is long past time to stop believing the claims of these so-called conservationists that are opposed to all types of activities on public and private lands. The environmentalists are destroying the very forests they claim to love.

Road access is essential. Yes, we have smokejumpers and airtankers and helicopters. But air resources are most effective as support tools for on-the-ground fire engines, water tenders, dozers and hand crews.

We have set aside all too much public land for roadless and wilderness management. Environmentalists continue to stop every effort to build roads and harvest timber on multiple-use lands. These unroaded and unmanaged timberlands are going to become bigger deposits of fuel every year until they finally burn. Environmentalists are trying to convince everyone that fire is natural, and that these wildfires are "good" and "natural". Big fires are not good, because the fuel loads are so heavy that the soils are sterilized. If we continue to let environmentalists dictate the management of these lands, we are going to lose our forests. Global warming is not

going to cease any time soon. Meanwhile, fires will continue to occur, and there will be more and more acreage of intensely burned forest lands that will not recover. New seedlings will not grow back. There is historical evidence of this from fires over the past 100 years, so it should not be a surprise that as landscapes become drier they won't re-forest in the future. Our best chance of keeping forests on these drier landscapes is to manage them more intensively now, and to prevent catastrophic fires from destroying the existing tree cover.

Environmentalists claim that because major wildfires have burned through industrial timberlands, there is obviously no reduction in fire risk due to harvesting by the timber companies. Yes, some industrial timberlands that were thinned have burned, but the acreage of such burns is far less than other types of forest lands that were not previously thinned. Anyone with knowledge of fire fighting knows that it is much easier to control a fire where the fuels have been reduced via thinning or partial cutting. This is not rocket science. Less fuel equals less fire intensity.

Environmentalists claim they stop very few timber sales or fuel reduction projects on public lands. That is not true. As an agency employee, I know that the vast majority of projects that involve removal of trees are appealed and/or litigated. The appeals and litigation end up reducing the size of the project to a miniscule fraction of what it started out to be. This is easy for the State legislature to verify. Ask the agencies for the facts. It should be a fairly easy process for the Governor, or for the State Legislature to ask the U.S. Forest Service for a report by National Forest. How many acres of fuel reduction and timber harvest were proposed by year for the past 10 years? How many of these projects were appealed and litigated? How many acres by project were actually treated?

[Word of caution when making the request of the Forest Service. Establish a personal relationship with the agency, so that you trust the numbers you get. It will be easy for the USFS to make a quick and cursory report that overlooks many of the small projects at the Ranger District level that are not pursued due to the threat of appeals.] Shine the truth on the false claims by these environmental protection groups, and see what happens.

Work with the Forest Service and other agencies to require an additional breakdown of acreage burned to gain some long-term statistics. Ask the overhead teams to report acreage burned by: 1) acres of natural timberland, 2) acres of pre-thinned timberland, 3) acres of pre-harvested timberland, and 4) acres of grassland. That will tell you the effectiveness of thinning and harvesting. Maybe you can get the agencies and timber companies to go back and develop those statistics for the past 10 years.

Cost-reduction is a buzzword with the Incident Management Teams. But, they don't practice what they preach. There is considerable waste. There are resources and people that are not fully utilized. On State fires, use a comptroller that oversees and approves expenditures on a daily basis. Include periodic reviews by qualified overhead to question the Incident Management Team about the necessity of people and equipment.

1. Example. 3 people work steadily and with some stress for 15 hours a day to do a support job. With 3 people there are no frills in the quality of work performed. But 5 people are hired to allow some flexibility in work schedules and reduce stress on individuals, and they all charge 15 hours a day. There are a few frills accomplished by these 5 people. A comptroller could question the IMT if they can get by with fewer personnel in camp, and if they could reduce the service they provide to everyone asking for assistance or information.

2. Example. Teams are reluctant to release a resource for fear that if they release it a day too soon they will be criticized for incompetence or sued for negligence. Maybe the legislature can deal with the legal liability issues involved with making decisions to release something too soon in an effort to reduce costs.

Private landowners have either expended some effort to reduce the risk of fire burning their buildings, or they have done nothing. It is not the job of firefighters to reduce fuels around structures that are in the path of a wildfire. There are huge costs involved with putting structure wrap on buildings, and in removing wood piles and cutting fuels around buildings. The legislature can set the policy that landowners are responsible for their place, and firefighters will not make any extraordinary effort to save structures. Taxpayers should not pay for preparing someone's property for an on-coming wildfire.

What sort of firefighting effort does the State legislature want? A new Cadillac with all the latest bells and whistles, or a well used farm truck? You get what you pay for. There are more news agencies and more people wanting information on every fire. Fulfilling requests for maps, information, and reports can be done, but it all costs money. If the IMT is expected to produce endless maps for every request, then it costs money to develop and print those maps on a daily basis. Twenty years ago we didn't produce a fraction of the reports we now do, and yet the fires went out. On State fires, set limits on what sort of service the IMT should produce. On Federal fires, encourage the Feds to minimize their requests for maps and reports.

Eastern Montana has a unique situation, in that the private landowners expect the firefighters to save every bite of grass for their livestock. Saving grass can be done, but it takes fire engines to do it. Most IMTs are focused on controlling the perimeter, and don't commit resources to mopping up fire within the interior. This usually results in bitter complaints from the owners of the grass. Everything with firefighting can be done, but it costs money. Sometimes the resources aren't there to do everything. Priorities need to be set. The legislature can help in establishing some expectations for teams to manage big fires on private lands, and can provide the liaisons to talk with ranchers about what can be realistically accomplished.

Contract food services need a good hard look. The caterers are following strict contracts to provide "every" firefighter a set number of calories per meal. That works for the line firefighters....but there are 100 to 200 people in support positions that are being overfed every day. There needs to be a distinction between the quantity of food served to a line firefighter, and the quantity served to a support firefighter. Even the hotshot crews don't want all of the food that is provided to them....they have habits of eating lean. I would think there should be some level of cost reduction due to serving less food. There just appears to be a large amount of food wasted every day at a large caterer. With all the emphasis on people being overweight, this is a good place to try and reduce the costs. The contractual requirements for food service no longer make common sense.

/s/ Dick Schwecke

/s/ Sue Schwecke

Heisel, Leanne

From: Sarah Carlson [scarlson@macdnet.org]
Sent: Tuesday, January 08, 2008 3:52 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: MACD Comments for the Fire Suppression Committee

Hello Leanne:

In response to the December 14, 2007 memo from the Fire Suppression Committee, I would like to let you know that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) recently passed a resolution related to wildfire management, which I have pasted below. Please let me know if the Committee needs any additional information or has any questions. Thank you.

Sarah Carlson

*Executive Director; Montana Association of Conservation Districts
scarlson@macdnet.org; 406-443-5711*

Montana CDs: Local Common Sense Conservation

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**Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) Resolution  
07-01  
WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT**

WHEREAS, some fires on federal, state and private lands are a valuable tool to prevent catastrophic fires; and

WHEREAS, the resources these fires consume are crucial to the long-term survivability of all who enjoy and use our natural resources; and

WHEREAS, recent fires due to extreme drought have become more dangerous to private lands that adjoin where most fires occur; and

WHEREAS, the fires in the headwaters of most drainages are crucial to supplying water year-round to irrigators, stock waters and communities; and

WHEREAS, allowing these fires during drought years go uncontrolled have detrimental effects to the water supplies for many years to come; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts at its 2007 annual meeting urges the Forest Service, Congress and the President of the United States to consider a revised policy which includes immediate suppression of fires in a watershed drainage in drought years.

*Submitted by Chouteau County Conservation District  
Passed MACD General Business Session November 15, 2007*

1/8/2008

**Heisel, Leanne**

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**From:** Mmontanadream@aol.com  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 10, 2008 12:59 PM  
**To:** Heisel, Leanne  
**Subject:** TOPIC: fire suppression (or lack of) in Bitterroot Valley

TOPIC: fire suppression (or lack of) in Bitterroot Valley

Without changes in our changes to our fire suppression policies, I believe the following will result:

Tourism and population will begin a migration out of Montana to areas that have lower fire risks or more effective policies enacted.

People need and want predictably clean air (especially during spring, summer and fall when enjoying outdoor activities). No matter how dramatically beautiful the natural beauty of the mountains and rivers, if there is no clean air, no one will come to spend money and citizens will be forced to move away. The losses are already visible in tourist town of Darby. Most of Darby is for sale and there is no employment hope for the future.

Our state will experience a dramatic loss of out of state revenue which will exponentiation with each fire season uncontrolled. Businesses will leave for safer and higher quality areas.

Montana taxes will need to increase in order to fund services to the needy, aged, orphaned etc. or these services will enact deep funding cuts.

The educational level of our colleges as well as secondary/primary schools will suffer.

We are currently in a drought cycle. Intensity and numbers of fires will not improve under these drought conditions. The dust bowl drought lasted 20 years and took several after to finally see some recovery. Montana will be hard pressed to survive and recover in a lifetime unless we modify and address current policies. Already, one can visit the burn areas and see that these fires are so hot and huge, the land is scorched beyond recovery. The land lays sterile with no hope of regeneration for decades. We are experiencing fires too hot to allow even pine cones to open and reseed burn areas.

Living in an area where one of the best paying employers is the fire fighting service, it is commonly known that fire fighting equipment is left behind, buried etc in order to keep the funding levels the same each season. This results, eventually, is fire fighting costs escalating to such high costs, the states experiencing the fires will be years trying to recover such spending demands.

Under the good intentions of eco policies, natural burns and land management, current policies and environmental activist groups will love this wonderful land to death. Their love off sets the natural balance of nature. Allowing unchecked burns, whether by policy or delays due to slow decision making resulting from governmental layers of authority creates a hopelessness in the communities watching one acre burn grow to 120 acre burn while local firefighters stand helplessly and watch.

Lung disease and related health problems are on the increase in the Bitterroot. Once a population develops these diseases, the illness requires long term care resulting in large medical cost increases. If this area does not thrive from fresh hunting, vacationing and fishing money infusions, the locals will increasingly have to rely on social services to cope.

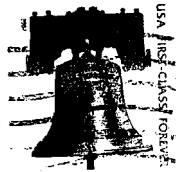
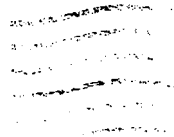
In conclusion, without sound, wise changes made now to our fire suppression policies, Montana may

1/10/2008





William Weisenburg



Jan, 9, 2008

I am writing  
in response to your invitation  
to comment on fire suppression.

We have a very serious situation  
I witnessed the events surrounding  
one fire the Rambo fire on the West Fork  
Ranger District Bitterroot National Forest.

The fire began on July 31, 2007 with  
a lightning strike in the evening. Reported  
by look outs and spotted the following  
morning by air patrol. This fire is  
started only a few miles from the USES  
Long Pine Peli port. I believe there needs  
to be a detailed investigation of the  
~~time~~ time line of when suppression began.

Under the extreme volatile conditions  
of recent summers it is imperative  
to fight these fires in the crucial  
early stages to delay is unthinkable.

1  
June 13, 2007

We need a stated policy  
of suppressing all fires in the  
National Forest during high fire  
danger summers as soon as possible.

My neighbors and I who along with  
thousands of others suffered the smoke  
of this fire while forest service  
personnel reaped the benefits. Seven  
million dollars up in smoke while  
forest roads and trails deteriorate  
to unusable and impassable conditions.

We want the truth about why this  
fire was not fought in its crucial  
early stages. There is a time line  
we need to know. Many of us  
tax payers do not consider these  
project fires a success.

William Weisenburg

Nez Perce rd Darby Montana

**Heisel, Leanne**

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Living in an area where one of the best paying employers is the fire fighting service, it is commonly known that fire fighting equipment is left behind, buried etc in order to keep the funding levels the same each season. This results, eventually, is fire fighting costs escalating to such high costs, the states experiencing the fires will be years trying to recover such spending demands.

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Lung disease and related health problems are on the increase in the Bitterroot. Once a population develops these diseases, the illness requires long term care resulting in large medical cost increases. If this area does not thrive from fresh hunting, vacationing and fishing money infusions, the locals will increasingly have to rely on social services to cope.

In conclusion, without sound, wise changes made now to our fire suppression policies, Montana may

become an historical example of the disaster resulting from well meaning stupidity putting lobbyist power and agendas vs common sense drawn from centuries of natural history. It is time for all factions to pull together before we tip over the precipice upon which we are now poised. Design and employ policies to benefit the balance of humans, animals and nature in our delicate Montana, or our future generations will suffer the sad consequences.

1. The following are some suggestions I believe may re mediate forest and wild fires disasters:
2. Remove the governmental decision making layers so when a fire is first discovered, the directive to all firefighters is to extinguish the fire as safely and best as they can while waiting for national firefighting support.
3. Allow modern style logging into our threatened forestlands within three months after a fire. Require a contract of reforestation policy under the law.

So, here is just a citizens input. There may be wiser, more experienced minds to contribute solutions to these imperative challenges ahead, but mine represent the citizens who live and treasure this beautiful state and our wonderful valley, the Bitterroot. Everyone here seems to have an opinion, but I feel it is important to voice my frustrations to those who may be able to resolve the problems than to complain to a neighbor.

I wish you good luck, and hope you are inundated with brilliant suggestions!

Sincerely,  
Noell Pennington  
mmontanadream@aol.com

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Start the year off right. Easy ways to stay in shape in the new year.

**Heisel, Leanne**

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**From:** Sevalstad6@aol.com  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 10, 2008 2:49 PM  
**To:** Heisel, Leanne  
**Subject:** Comments on how fires are being handled.

c/o Leanne Heisel, Dear Ms. Heisel, I am writing in regards to the Shaw Mountain , Pattengail Creek Fire, and the Battle Mountain Fire. I was in Wisdom , Montana visiting Lyle and Denny Klasen , within a couple of days of both these fires starting. This was also during the Big Hole Battlefield Nez Pierce gathering. Both of these fires could have been put out with a 5 gallon bucket of water. Comments in Wisdom were made that the US Forest Service might be in hot water because they didn't even attempt to put either fire out. I attended the Nez Pierce Gathering, and while I was listening to the Nez Pierce talking about their ancestors , firefighters were laughing about the fire on Battle Mountain right above the gathering. Both of these fires could have been put out. Later on into the summer, firefighters were saying how they wouldn't let them fight the fires when they would die down, only when they were raging. I don't think anybody enjoys all the smoke, and I know home owners in the Big Hole didn't enjoy all the fear the Forest Service was handing out, and all the expense these fires cost. Thank You for your time, Mike Sevalstad, 509 Stewart St., Anaconda, Montana, 59711.

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Start the year off right. Easy ways to stay in shape in the new year.

**Heisel, Leanne**

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**From:** Rand & Pat [randpat@3rivers.net]  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 10, 2008 3:15 PM  
**To:** Heisel, Leanne  
**Subject:** Fire Suppression Committee call for comments

Dear Committee: Nature has its own burn policies and she usually wins. We must learn to work with her. We can use fire management that is effective with less risk and cost if we strategically pick spots where fire is manageable and let it burn where it is not. We should not take action that isn't effective, costs millions but doesn't control fire. We should designate wildland hazard areas throughout our counties. We can create special taxing areas, special impact fees or other fees for those who insist on building in hazardous urban wildland interface areas. We can urge planning boards to look seriously at proposed subdivisions and educate private home builders who insist on building in fire-risk areas.

Forest service officials state that fires have exceeded their operations capability. After the 2007 season of fire that is absolutely true. We need to start learning, again, to live with fire—which is a natural resource. Fire experts say that fire-use fires don't just benefit the landscape and wildlife; burned areas reduce fuels in the forest and can serve as fire breaks when big wildfires break out, giving fire fighters strategy.

Labels such as 'fire use' or 'fire suppression' are confusing to the public. We need to come to a better understanding and mindset when nature decides to burn and use our firefighters' lives and our tax dollars much much more sensibly.

I don't know what the legislature can do about making laws about fires, but they can take a stand on more logical and sensible approaches to allowing a let-it-burn policy.  
Thanks for letting us send comments. Pat Bradley, Box 272, Twin Bridges MT 59754

**Heisel, Leanne**

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**From:** Brendan Donovan [bren.donovan@verizon.net]

**Sent:** Thursday, January 10, 2008 3:03 PM

**To:** Heisel, Leanne

**Cc:** raizouli@erols.com

**Subject:** Fire suppression ideas from the public....

Inventor , here -  
has new concept for 'fire break' lines .... using dry chemical retardant, packed in sleeves  
....prepositioned in deep  
remote wilderness ....high in tree tops ...by copter...long before fire season starts.!

Auto retardant release ... cell phone 'help call boxes'..., smoke detect systems ,early warning alarms  
all... prepositioned from MT historical fire records data base ...

And of course ...the Lightning Suppressor (a grounding apparatus and charge dissipater) , but then  
thats a bit  
we can discuss later...if the funders have any interest.

Let me know ..

Bren (from MA)

1/10/2008